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Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Behaviour among University Students: A Commerce and Management Perspective

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Abstract:

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a critical concern within the modern economic and business landscape. Rising industrialization, urbanization, and consumption-driven development have placed immense strain on the environment, exacerbating issues such as climate change, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. In this context, higher education-particularly in the fields of commerce and management-plays a pivotal role in fostering an eco-conscious mind-set among students.

The objective of this study is to examine the levels of environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour among university students. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the extent to which higher education institutions are effective in cultivating a positive attitude toward sustainability among their students. This research is based on primary data collected from 120 students using a structured questionnaire anchored on a five-point Likert scale. The data was analysed using percentage and mean score methods.

The findings of the study indicate that students possess a high level of awareness regarding environmental issues. They are well-informed about the significance of climate change, pollution control, and sustainable development. However, the actual adoption of sustainable practices remains at a moderate level. The expected level of action is not observed in areas such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and the adoption of eco-friendly habits. This clearly highlights a discernible gap between knowledge and actual behaviour.

Based on these findings, the study underscores the imperative to integrate sustainability more comprehensively into commerce and management education curricula. It is essential to provide students with practical, hands-on experiences through coursework, projects, and field-based initiatives. In conclusion, higher education institutions have the potential to play a pivotal role in shaping a generation of responsible and environmentally conscious professionals.

Keywords: Environmental Awareness, Sustainable Behaviour, Commerce Education, Management Education, Sustainability, Green Practices

INTRODUCTION:

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a critical issue in the modern era. Rapid processes of industrialization, urbanization, and economic development have led to the extensive depletion of natural resources and escalating environmental degradation. Issues such as global warming, climate change, deforestation, water scarcity, and pollution cast doubt upon the sustainability of current development models. In today's global economy, businesses are no longer expected merely to generate profits; there is a growing expectation that they operate in an environmentally friendly and responsible manner. Concepts such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Green Marketing, Sustainable Supply Chains, and ethical business practices are gaining increasing significance. Against this backdrop, the role of education becomes paramount, as it fosters within individuals the awareness and skills essential for sustainable development.

Commerce and Management education plays a pivotal role in preparing students for the business and industrial sectors. Graduates in these fields go on to become future entrepreneurs, managers, policymakers, and decision-makers. Their understanding of environmental issue and their capacity to adopt sustainable practices, can have far-reaching impacts on both society and the economy.

Higher education institutions are instrumental in shaping the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of students. Through the integration of sustainability into the curriculum, public awareness campaigns, and "Green Campus" initiatives, these institutions can cultivate environmentally conscious behaviors among their students. This study analyzes the levels of environmental awareness and sustainable behavior among university students, while also examining the specific role played by Commerce and Management education in this context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine the level of environmental awareness among university students.
2. To analyze sustainable behaviour among students from a commerce and management perspective and identify the gap between awareness and actual practices.
3. To evaluate the role of higher education institutions in promoting environmental sustainability and to suggest measures for strengthening sustainability education

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The concept of sustainable development gained global recognition through the work of Brundtland, who defined it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). This definition emphasized the necessity of balancing economic growth with environmental protection.

The United Nations further strengthened this perspective by introducing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which highlight environmental sustainability, responsible consumption, and climate action as key global priorities (United Nations, 2015). Education has been identified as a crucial driver in achieving these goals, as it helps in developing awareness and responsible behaviour among individuals.

Previous studies have consistently underlined the importance of environmental education in shaping sustainable behaviour. According to Sterling (2001), education plays a transformative role in fostering environmental consciousness. Similarly, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) observed that environmental knowledge positively influences pro-environmental behaviour, although the relationship is not always direct. In the context of commerce and management education, sustainability has become an essential component. Scholars such as Bebbington, Unerman, and O'Dwyer (2014) have emphasized the integration of sustainability into business curricula to prepare students for modern business challenges. Concepts like green accounting, sustainable finance, and environmental management are increasingly incorporated into academic programs.

Despite growing awareness, several studies indicate a gap between knowledge and actual behaviour. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior explains that attitudes do not always translate into action due to various external and internal factors. This highlights the need for practical, experience-based learning approaches to bridge the gap between environmental awareness and sustainable practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study employs a descriptive research methodology to examine environmental awareness and sustainable behaviour among university students. Both primary and secondary data have been utilized for this research. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, which facilitated the measurement of students' awareness, attitudes, and behaviour. Secondary data was gathered from books, research articles, academic journals, and various reports. A sample of 120 university students from the Faculty of Commerce and Management was selected for this study. Convenience sampling was employed as the method for data collection. Statistical tools specifically percentage analysis and mean score analysis were utilized to analyse the data. The findings have been presented in tabular form to ensure clarity and coherence.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Table 1: Environmental Awareness

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	7	5.83%
Disagree	11	9.17%
Neutral	19	15.83%
Agree	51	42.50%
Strongly Agree	32	26.67%
Total	**120**	**100%**

Interpretation:

The data indicates a high level of environmental awareness among students. A majority (69.17%) of respondents fall under the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories, suggesting strong awareness regarding environmental issues. Only 15% of respondents expressed disagreement, while a moderate portion (15.83%) remained neutral. Overall, the findings reflect a positive inclination toward environmental consciousness among students.

Table 2: Sustainable Behaviour

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	10	8.33%
Disagree	15	12.50%
Neutral	28	23.33%
Agree	42	35.00%
Strongly Agree	25	20.84%
Total	**120**	**100%**

Interpretation:

The data indicates that sustainable behaviour among students is moderate. A combined 55.84% of respondents fall under the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories, showing a reasonable level of engagement in sustainable practices. However, a significant proportion of students (20.83%) expressed disagreement, and 23.33% remained neutral. This distribution suggests that despite awareness, sustainable practices are not consistently adopted, highlighting a gap between knowledge and actual behaviour.

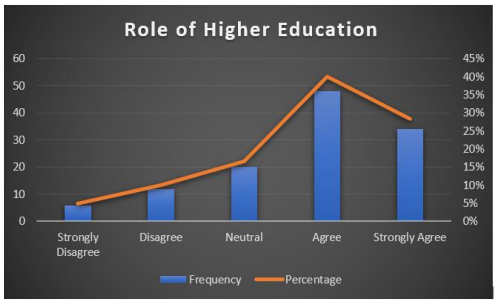

Chart 1: Role of Higher Education

Interpretation:

The findings present a compelling indication that higher education institutions are perceived as pivotal agents in advancing environmental sustainability among students. A substantial majority (68.33%) of respondents have expressed agreement or strong agreement, underscoring the influential role of academic institutions in nurturing environmental consciousness and responsible behaviour. The relatively low proportion of disagreement (15%) further reinforces the positive perception toward institutional initiatives. However, the presence of a neutral segment (16.67%) suggests scope for enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of sustainability-driven programs. Overall, the results strongly affirm that higher education institutions serve as critical platforms for embedding sustainability values and fostering environmentally responsible future professionals.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION:

The results derived from the data analysis provide a clear and structured understanding of environmental awareness, sustainable behaviour, and the role of higher education among university students. Table 1 indicates that a substantial majority of respondents (69.17%) fall under the "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" categories, confirming a high level of environmental awareness. This suggests that students are well-informed about key environmental concerns, which is consistent with existing literature emphasizing the impact of education and media in enhancing environmental knowledge.

However, Table 2 presents a comparatively moderate level of sustainable behaviour. Although 55.84% of respondents reported agreement with practising sustainable behaviour, a notable proportion remained neutral (23.33%) or expressed disagreement (20.83%). This clearly highlights a gap between awareness and actual behavioural practices. Such findings align with prior research, which indicates that awareness alone does not necessarily result in behavioural change, often due to lack of practical engagement and motivation. Further, Table 3 demonstrates that 68.33% of respondents acknowledge the significant role of higher education institutions in promoting sustainability. This reinforces the view that institutions are key drivers in shaping environmentally responsible attitudes. The findings suggest that while institutions are recognized for their role, there is still scope to enhance practical and experiential learning opportunities.

Overall, the results confirm that although awareness levels are high, sustainable behaviour is not proportionately reflected, thereby validating the existence of a knowledge action gap.

CONCLUSION:

The study concludes that environmental awareness among university students is significantly high, as evidenced by the data analysis. However, sustainable behaviour remains at a moderate level, indicating that awareness does not consistently translate into action. This gap between knowledge and practice is a critical concern, particularly from a commerce and management perspective, where students are future decision-makers. Higher education institutions are perceived as playing a crucial role in promoting sustainability, yet there is a need to strengthen their efforts through practical, application-oriented approaches. Integrating sustainability into the curriculum, encouraging field-based learning, and promoting institutional initiatives can help bridge this gap. The study is limited to a sample of 120 students, and future research may expand the scope by including larger and more diverse populations. Nonetheless, the findings provide valuable insights into the need for a more action-driven approach to sustainability education.

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